

Briscoe to head Court of Appeals

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By David Roach

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TOPEKA — The Kansas Supreme Court broke with tradition last week by passing over a senior judge and naming Judge Mary Beck Briscoe as chief judge of the Kansas Court of Appeals.

Briscoe was promoted Aug. 30 to replace Chief Judge Bob Abbott, who assumed a position on the Kansas Supreme Court on Friday.

Briscoe is the court's fourth chief judge since it was re-established in 1977 and the first woman to hold that position, said Ron Keefover, public information officer for the Office of Judicial Administration.

Keefover said it was the first time the senior judge on the court was not appointed to chief judge.

The Supreme Court justices gave no reason for passing over the senior judge on the Court of Appeals, Judge John Rees, in making the appointment, Keefover said.

Briscoe said that in addition to a full case load, she would be responsible for the administration of the Court of Appeals and for scheduling

court dockets. The court's 10 members sit in panels of three judges to hear cases.

Marcia Poell, executive director of the Kansas Bar Association, said Briscoe was breaking new ground for women in the legal profession.

"She is, first and foremost, a very well-qualified judge," Poell said.

Briscoe is also co-chairperson for the KBA's Task Force on the Status of Women in the Legal Profession.

She said she hoped her appointment would encourage other women lawyers and make people realize women could be promoted in the courts.

Briscoe said that compared to other states with similar populations, Kansas had fewer women presiding over state district courts.

"The simple function of time is changing the situation," she said. "For the most part, it's a matter of not having enough women with enough experience to apply."

Briscoe said that universities only recently had begun producing women lawyers in large numbers and that as more women became



Mary Beck Briscoe

qualified, more women would become judges.

"We're just now at that point in Kansas," she said.

Briscoe, 43, was born in Council Grove. She earned a bachelor's degree from the University of Kansas in 1969 and graduated from the KU School of Law in 1973.

In 1974, she began serving as an assistant U.S. attorney for the District of Kansas. She earned a master's degree in law this year from the University of Virginia School of Law.